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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRAGUE 000708

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SUBJECT: SECRETARY CHERTOFF'S OCTOBER 27 VISIT TO THE CZECH
REPUBLIC

Classified By: Ambassador Richard Graber, E.O. 12958, reasons 1.5 (b) a
nd (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: During his October 27 visit to Prague, DHS
Secretary Chertoff met with embattled PM Topolanek, DPM
Vondra, Interior Minister Langer, and FM Schwarzenberg.
Czech officials were grateful for the advent of the Visa
Waiver program (VWP) and had no regrets about having
confronted the EU on it. Both the PM and FM raised the
request that the new President make an early 2009 trip to
Prague to meet with the 27 EU heads of government. While
Czech officials were clearly absorbed with the current
turmoil in Czech politics, they were just as clearly
beginning to focus on the Czech Republic's upcoming EU
Presidency. End Summary
PM Topolanek: Tired but Relatively Upbeat

¶2. (C) PM Topolanek appeared tired but relatively upbeat,
given his fresh electoral defeat. He said his government
would present missile defense legislation in both houses of
parliament the following week. (In fact, for complex
political reasons, neither house has yet taken it up.)
Topolanek speculated the current political situation could
actually improve the chances for ratification, since now that
elections were over, some of the partisan rancor toward his
government might subside.

¶3. (C) PM Topolanek urged that the next U.S. President
attend a &informal meeting with all 27 EU leaders in April
in Prague; this would be an important signal for U.S.-EU
cooperation.

¶4. (C) Secretary Chertoff observed that the killing of the
Czech Ambassador in the Islamabad Marriott Hotel bombing, and
recent events in Georgia, illustrate the common threats and
objectives the U.S. and Czechs share.

¶5. (C) The Secretary told the PM that Czechs will be able to
travel to the U.S. without visas starting on November 17. It
will be important for Czechs to understand the Electronic
Standard Travel Authorization (ESTA). The Secretary
expressed appreciation for the leadership role the Czechs had
played in moving forward with the Visa Waiver Program (VWP).
Topolanek acknowledged the Czech initiative had angered EU
officials, but &that,s life.8 The VWP had removed the
last vestiges of the Cold War, and better information sharing
would increase security and safety.

¶6. (C) The Secretary urged the PM to take initiative during
the Czech EU Presidency to forge U.S.-EU agreement on privacy
and personal data protection issues.

¶7. (C) The PM speculated that the global financial crisis
would shift European politics to the left. Energy security
and missile defense would remain important in light of
Russian ambitions. Topolanek predicted his government would
stay in place long enough to ratify missile defense
legislation.

¶8. (C) PM Topolanek asked about the status of the Czech
Republic on the Special 301 Watch List. He pointed out that
the Czech government is doing its best to improved
enforcement on border areas, and he hoped that the Czech
Republic would be removed from the list in 2009. The

Ambassador replied that the U.S. and Czech government had good exchange of information on the subject, and that the Czech government has a clear roadmap of what it needs to do to be removed from the list.

Czechs Prevailed Over EU on VWP

19. (C) At lunch, Deputy Prime Minister Vondra and Interior Minister Langer thanked Secretary Chertoff and the USG for Czech accession to the Visa Waiver Program (VWP), noting that the effective date of November 17 is significant to Czechs as the start of the Velvet Revolution of 1989. Vondra noted that the GOCR succeeded in negotiating VWP in spite of the early objections of other EU states, who at first wanted to negotiate a common US/EU visa policy, which would have delayed the process for the aspirant countries, since the larger EU states already participate in VWP and had no incentive to change the program.

10. (C) Minister Langer said that the GOCR is comfortable supporting the recent European proposal on Passenger Name Record (PNR) data sharing between the EU and the U.S., but German diplomats informed them that this proposal is unlikely to pass in the current EU Parliament. Secretary Chertoff believes that DHS can implement certain data management rules to allow it to use EU passenger data and address EU privacy concerns. If there is no progress on this matter soon, however, the new U.S. President is unlikely to address it until 2011 or 2012. DHS hopes to provide a non-binding document of general principles to the GOCR, and hopes that an agreement on principles will meet EU requirements. A document should be ready in Dec. 2008, and DHS will forward through Embassy Prague for review.

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FM: Only Topolanek Can Keep Coalition Together

11. (C) With FM Schwarzenberg, Secretary Chertoff said he was delighted that the VWP is underway. Chertoff said the differences between the U.S. and EU on privacy and personal data protection issues are superficial and can be resolved. Chertoff said he hoped that general principles could be worked out during the French EU Presidency and that more specific agreement reached during the Czech EU Presidency.

12. (C) Schwarzenberg also strongly urged that the next U.S. President agree to an early visit to Prague to meet with all 27 EU leaders. Chertoff replied that this would be a decision for the incoming administration, but that he would convey the request.

13. (C) The Ambassador asked for the FM's assessment of Czech government stability going into the EU Presidency. Schwarzenberg said PM Topolanek is in a difficult position, but Topolanek is the only person who can hold together the current governing three-party coalition. Opposition Social Democrat Party (CSSD) leader Jiri Paroubek is in no hurry to take over government now, given the prospect of an economic downturn over the next few months. The chances for the passage of missile defense are limited, the FM said, because they depend on Topolanek keeping together the current government coalition. The question, according to Schwarzenberg, is whether Topolanek will survive the December 5-7 ODS party congress. Schwarzenberg predicted the effects of the global financial crisis will be felt later and less in the Czech Republic than in the rest of Europe.

Dinner with MPs and Officials

14. (C) At a dinner hosted by Ambassador Graber, Secretary Chertoff had an opportunity to continue his discussion with key Czech officials and parliamentarians, including DFM Kohout, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee Richard Sequens, and Chairman of the Lower Chamber's Foreign Affairs Committee Jan Hamacek. All participants reflected on the hard work both governments accomplished to bring the Czech Republic into the Visa Waiver Program. For the Czech officials present, Czech entry into

VWP represented another key milestone in the country,s progress since the 1989 Velvet Revolution. DFM Kohout expressed the hope that this level of bilateral cooperation would continue.

¶15. (C) Secretary Chertoff agreed and noted that the good working relations established will be especially helpful during the Czech EU Presidency. Secretary Chertoff then singled out the on-going effort of the US-EU High Level Contact Group to agree on a list of key principles of data privacy. This list remains to be formalized and while the United States is working with the French to do so during their EU presidency, if these items are not wrapped up by the end of the year, Chertoff noted this work would then fall to the Czech presidency.

¶16. (C) As in other meetings, Czech officials wanted to discuss the impact of a new U.S. administration on key foreign policy issues, among them the financial crisis, relations with Europe, and missile defense (MD). On MD, the Senator Sequens, a strong supporter of MD, and MP Hamacek, an MD opponent, carried on a spirited debate about the MD system and the process of ratification, which was just getting under way in the Czech Republic. Although the two did not come to an agreement, they appreciated Secretary Chertoff,s insights about Russia and its concerns about MD.

¶17. (U) Secretary Chertoff has not cleared this message.
Graber